



NATIONAL
SAFETY
MONTH 07

Curb driving behaviors that contribute to crashes

More people than ever before are crowding our nation's roads and highways – 201 million people, in fact. Although the number of injuries and fatalities on the road has dropped by 16 percent, motor vehicle accidents remain the number one preventable cause of death.

After years behind the wheel, it's difficult to realize that driving habits may have deteriorated – are you as vigilant a driver as you were in the early days? With a little common sense, a lot of patience and respect for fellow travelers, you can greatly reduce the risk you take by getting on the road.

Driving Risks

- Speeding is the most common error cited in fatal accidents, reducing reaction time and increasing vehicle stopping distance and crash impact.
- Impaired driving, due to use of alcohol, or medications. In 2005, alcohol was a factor in more than 40 percent of road fatalities.
- Distracted driving accounts for as many as 25 percent of car crashes. Most common distractions include radio/CD tuning, cell phones, eating, personal grooming, or trying to grab out-of-reach objects.

Tips for Prevention

- Obey the speed limit – each road is calculated individually, to determine the best speed for safe driving. Plus, the stoplights are calibrated based on the speed limit, so you won't have to hit the brakes so much.
- Slow down on poor roads, in bad weather, and in crowded areas.
- Allow enough time to get to your destination, and be patient – speeding usually won't get you there faster, it will just get you there angrier.
- Know the side effects of any medication you're taking, and be alert for any symptoms of impairment, such as drowsiness, excitability, altered depth perception, and altered reaction time. Many over-the-counter drugs can impair driving, particularly antihistamines and cough and cold preparations. So, too can prescriptions, particularly anti-anxiety drugs.
- Don't drink and drive. Ever.
- When you're driving, drive. Don't multi-task. If there's something you need to do in transit – makeup, phone call, breakfast – pull over, put the car in park, and do it then.
- Adjust your mirrors, radio/CD or temperature controls before you pull out, not while you're driving.
- Don't reach under or behind the seat to retrieve things, or turn around to talk to passengers.
- Put the cell phone down, especially in hazardous conditions such as heavy traffic, higher speeds, or bad weather.

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